

## BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

David, Nicolette (2020) And the dead return: Klein and the Uncanny in Schnitzler's "Flowers" and "Dream Story". *PsyArt* 24 , pp. 51-84. ISSN 2123-4434.

Downloaded from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/30631/>

*Usage Guidelines:*

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html>  
contact [lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk).

or alternatively



**“And the dead return”: Klein and the “Uncanny” in Schnitzler’s “Flowers”  
and *Dream Story***

**Nicolette David**

Lecturer in Italian and German  
Convenor of Italian Studies  
Department of Cultures and Languages  
Birkbeck College, University of London

**ABSTRACT:**

This article proposes a Kleinian re-working of Freud’s “The Uncanny” through an exploration of Arthur Schnitzler’s “Flowers” and *Dream Story*, works in which female figures appear to return from the dead to persecute the living. It argues that these women may be seen to be animated by Melanie Klein’s insights into infantile aggression. Starting with a discussion of Freud’s essay “The Uncanny” and the recent critical response to it, the article then explores in depth the significance of the persecutory women in the two stories. In both, these “uncanny” female bodies are experienced as coming to life in order to launch a deadly attack. The article concludes that the “Kleinian Uncanny” is a powerful critical tool for the analysis of Schnitzler’s texts.

**KEYWORDS:** persecutory; Freud; infantile aggression; Schnitzler; the “Uncanny”; Klein

**To cite as:**

David, Nicolette, 2020, “And the dead return”: Klein and the “Uncanny” in Schnitzler’s “Flowers” and *Dream Story*, *PsyArt*, pp. 51-84.

Arthur Schnitzler's prose writings are, quite literally, haunted by dead female figures who come to life once more. This article will give a reading of Schnitzler's "Flowers" ("Blumen") (1894) and *Dream Story (Traumnovelle)* (1926) in the light of Freud's the "Uncanny" ("Das Unheimliche") and Klein's writings on infantile anxiety and aggression.<sup>1</sup> My purpose in doing so is twofold: first, I would like to explore an aspect of Schnitzler's writings which has hitherto been overlooked by critics and which I will show to be vital for an understanding of his work as a whole. Second, I aim to show that by giving a reading of Schnitzler's writings in the light of the "Uncanny" it is possible to frame a more robust theory of the "Uncanny" than that originally proposed by Freud, one which takes Kleinian aggression into account. This article enables us simultaneously to re-view Schnitzler and to re-view and re-imagine the psychoanalytic model through which this re-viewing takes place. Fictional and theoretical texts will therefore mutually illuminate one another. Freud famously wrote in 1919 that "the Uncanny" is in fact "something that has been repressed and now returns" in an estranged form: the purpose of this article is to shed new light on what is in fact returning. Indeed, I would argue that Freud's seminal theory of the "Uncanny" does not go nearly far enough in addressing the "Uncanny" in literary and cultural studies and it is time to allow Klein her rightful place in giving voice to what truly constitutes the "Uncanny". It is only through examining the "uncanny" aspect of Schnitzler that we can come to a deeper understanding of Schnitzler's prose works and, indeed, of the "Uncanny" itself.

Schnitzler is best known for social satire, bittersweet comedies which expose the hypocrisy and self-deception of fin-de-siècle Viennese society. In plays such as *La Ronde* (1903) and *Flirtations* (1895), he lays bare the Viennese soul: characters deceive themselves and one another in the endless pursuit of desire. Yet his prose writings are very different in

atmosphere. Despite their skilful use of irony and humour, Schnitzler's prose writings are in fact profoundly and disturbingly "uncanny". The sense of alienation which pervades the "Uncanny" could also be said to permeate Schnitzler's prose writings. They are pervaded by a wistful sense of melancholy, mournfulness and decay. It is this melancholy element which precipitates his characters into morbid thoughts and death. Certain of Schnitzler's short stories and novellas in particular, "Flowers" (1894), "The Murderer" (1910), *Dying* (1892), *Dead Men Tell No Tales* (1897), *Dream Story* (1926), even his novel *The Road to the Open* (1908) - these prose works are peopled by dead bodies, by characters who already seem to half-inhabit a penumbral, shadowy world in which death beckons. In many cases characters seem destined for death and frequently choose suicide. In fact, characters seem almost by definition to be potentially suicidal from the outset, either consciously or unconsciously. And what is most striking of all is the extent to which characters are, quite literally, *haunted* by ghostly characters or images of ghostliness which taint and poison their existence with phantasies of death to the point where these characters are very nearly precipitated to their real or phantasied deaths too.<sup>3</sup> These ghostly characters seem almost to lean back into life in order to snatch the living characters down into the abyss of death with them and death is presented as very seductive.

Edgar Allan Poe famously wrote that: "The death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world."<sup>4</sup> In her analysis of Poe's life and works, the psychoanalyst Marie Bonaparte argued that Poe's obsession with beautiful, dead women who haunt the protagonist or, in the words of the critic Lisa Downing, "a dead and resurrected female beloved"<sup>5</sup>, stems from the Oedipus complex and the death of Poe's mother, Elizabeth Arnold. Bonaparte argues that: "In order that Poe might become the kind of artist he was, a woman had first to die."<sup>6</sup> In her analysis of Poe's story, "The Oval Portrait", published in 1842, Bonaparte maintains that Poe is portraying his own relationship

with his dying wife, Virginia. Like the artist in the story who literally paints the colour and life from his living wife into the portrait, the writer Poe chose Virginia as his wife because she was marked out for death:

And, just as a painter poses a living woman for Venus or The Virgin, although in his mind's-eye he reconstructs some ideal image from his past, so Poe, when in his tales he paints his dying Virginia's poses, always reproduces the great mother's image that gleams through.<sup>7</sup>

For Bonaparte, therefore, stories such as “The Oval Portrait” and “Ligeia”, and poems such as “Annabel Lee”, all give expression to Poe's unresolved Oedipus complex, his unconscious longing for union with the dead mother.

In Schnitzler, death is a party filled with dead female figures, and everyone wants to join. These ghostly figures are mostly images of dead female characters, but in some cases, such as in *Dying* it is a male character who seeks to drag the Other into death with them. My argument will be that this ability to haunt is not in fact determined by gender, but springs instead from the aggression so vividly depicted by Klein in her accounts of female aggression. The characters in Schnitzler's shorts stories are, therefore, quite literally, haunted by death and by deathly figures, who are imagined as coming to life with deadly intent. It is this aspect of Schnitzler's writings which I propose to explore in this article.

That death is presented as seductive and alluring in Schnitzler's fiction is perhaps not in itself so surprising, given the Viennese obsession with death, epitomized by the Museum of Funeral History located at the Central Cemetery. I will argue, however, that it is the *aggressive nature* of these phantasies which renders a reading of the “Uncanny” in a Kleinian light so compelling. In these stories, dead people or objects which emanate from them come to “uncanny” life, become re-animated, and seem to call those who desire them to the grave. It is a call which is hard to resist because the erotic and the “Uncanny” are so powerfully fused in Schnitzler's writings. In this article I will show how desire and “the Uncanny” are inextricably intertwined, so that erotic love becomes love for death in the phantasies of

Schnitzler's protagonists. For the critic Martin Swales, sexual encounter in Schnitzler's writings is given a heightened whiff of adventure through its association with death.<sup>8</sup> This may well be so, but it does not go nearly far enough in addressing the truly "uncanny" appeal of death in Schnitzler. Whereas the proximity of death may add a certain frisson to a sexual encounter, the real question is *why* this is the case and how we can speak about the appeal of death in Schnitzler. Characters are not only rendered more desirable through their association with death, but they are desirable precisely *because* of it: characters in Schnitzler desire other characters precisely *because* they are dying or already dead. This is crystallized in particular in the representation of the body.<sup>9</sup> The fusion of the erotic and the "uncanny" is mapped on to the portrayal of the body, which therefore becomes what I would like to term the "uncanny" body. In my analysis of Schnitzler in the light of the "Uncanny", therefore, I will highlight three recurring strands, which are all inextricably intertwined: aggression, the fusion of the erotic and death, and the "uncanny" body. I will begin by giving a brief overview of Freud's "Uncanny" and the critical response to it, which will lead to a Kleinian re-working of the "Uncanny" through Schnitzler's "Flowers" and *Dream Story*.

### Freud

I will now give an account of insights revealed in Freud's famous essay, "The Uncanny", published in 1919. I will then proceed to discuss critics' response to the concept of the "Uncanny", in order to highlight the gap which a reading of the "Uncanny" in the light of Klein can fill. In doing so, I will seek to problematize and re-formulate Freud's theorization of the "Uncanny" through the theoretical writings of Klein.

In 1919 Freud published "The Uncanny" in which he traced the feeling of the

“uncanny”, that which is “*unheimlich*”, back to what has been repressed in that which is “*heimlich*”, the ‘homely’. “The uncanny”, Freud argues, “is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar.”<sup>10</sup> The “Uncanny”, therefore, is that which has been repressed and re-emerges within the home, the safe place. In his analysis of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s “The Sandman” (1816), Freud famously argued that, “the sense of the uncanny attaches directly to the figure of the Sand-Man and therefore to the idea of being robbed of one’s eyes”.<sup>11</sup> The Sand-Man, Freud asserts in this essay, appears as the “disruptor of love”<sup>12</sup> and stands in for the dreaded father at whose hands the boy-child fears castration. Freud continues in his masterly way:

These and many other features of the tale appear arbitrary and meaningless if one rejects the relation between fear for the eyes and fear of castration, but they become meaningful as soon as the Sand-Man is replaced by the dreaded father, at whose hands castration is expected<sup>13</sup>

For Freud, therefore, the “uncanny” effect is created through proximity to the castration complex. Freud theorizes the “uncanny” as the return of the repressed, namely the fear of castration, which is awakened by fear of losing one’s eyes, blindness. This fear of castration is “something that should have remained hidden and has come into the open”.<sup>14</sup>

For Freud, animated parts of the body in fictional texts give rise to a feeling of the “uncanny”:

Severed limbs, a severed head, a hand detached from the arm (...) feet that dance by themselves (...) – all of these have something highly uncanny about them, especially when they are credited, as in the last instance, with independent activity. We already know that this species of the uncanny stems from its proximity to the castration complex.<sup>15</sup>

Thus Freud opens up the question of the feeling of the “Uncanny” aroused by the animation of parts of the body, but he does not take this idea further himself. I will return to this important idea later, when I seek to re-view the “Uncanny” through the Kleinian optic.

For Freud, the “Uncanny” is characterized by repetition. The repressed returns over and over again, repetitively. Indeed, Freud argues that “anything that can remind us of this inner compulsion to repeat is perceived as uncanny”.<sup>16</sup> It would therefore seem to be the function of

the repetition itself which is “uncanny”. In an illuminating essay entitled, “Stifter and the Postmodern Sublime”, Michael Minden highlights the link between this “compulsion to repeat” and the death-instinct, which Freud elaborated in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920).<sup>17</sup> Minden argues that:

The persistence of the pattern of repetition in the life of the mind is finally evidence of a disposition in human mental life untouched by pleasure or any affirmative moment whatsoever, but rather driven by the trajectory of all organisms towards the inorganic state. Uncanniness is thus for Freud an experience of the mind in which the death instinct (our sense of our finitude as our most intimate possession) is manifest in the very figure - not the content - of repetition. Put another way, the kind of return of the repressed which we experience as uncanny (ie a *recognition* of the unfamiliar), is evidence of the death instinct.<sup>18</sup>

For Minden, the very repetition which constitutes the “Uncanny” comes from the death instinct. In highlighting repetition as constitutive of the “Uncanny”, Minden emphasizes an important point about the very repetition as “Uncanny” in itself. This is of direct relevance to a Kleinian account of the “Uncanny”. For Klein, the death-instinct is the “instinct of aggression”;<sup>19</sup> thus the repetition which, for Minden, comes from the death instinct could at one and the same time be seen to be the Kleinian “instinct of aggression” which returns repeatedly.

The “Uncanny” has a privileged relationship to the visual, to visuality. As Nicholas Royle writes in his book, *The uncanny*: “it is not so much darkness itself (whatever that may be) but the process of ceasing to be dark, the process of revelation or bringing to light, that is uncanny”.<sup>20</sup> The “Uncanny” seems, at least for Freud, to involve a “special emphasis on the visual, on what comes to light, on what is revealed to the eye”.<sup>21</sup> Paul de Man writes on the “uncanny”, “to make the invisible visible is uncanny”.<sup>22</sup> This process of becoming visible is highly relevant for the texts examined in this article, since the visual objects of the male protagonists’ respective gazes come to life and take them over.

At the same time, Freud placed a special emphasis on the blurring between fantasy and reality in his account of the “Uncanny”: “... an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred”.<sup>23</sup> This blurring between fantasy and reality



will also be of importance when we turn to our analysis of the “Uncanny” in the light of Klein, because the distinction between internal and external reality is a cornerstone of Kleinian theory. Donald Meltzer describes Klein’s insight as follows:

[She] made a discovery that created a revolutionary addition to the model of the mind, namely, that we do not live in one world, but in two – that we live in an internal world which is as real a place to live as the outside world (...) Psychic reality could be treated in a concrete way.<sup>24</sup>

Schnitzler’s masterful skill in blurring these two worlds is one of the principal cornerstones of his success in bringing the “Uncanny” to life in his prose writings, in particular in “Flowers” and in *Dream Story*.

### **Critical response to the ‘Uncanny’**

In recent years, critics have begun to explore the exciting potential offered by Freud’s theorization of the “Uncanny”. I will give a brief overview of recent developments in the field of the “Uncanny”; the purpose of this is to take the reader through them and show how their recent insights lead directly to and complement those offered by Klein. Klein’s insights, in turn, could be seen to lead to a re-formulation and re-fashioning of the Freudian “Uncanny” in the light of her clinical insights.

Royle, in his extensive and multi-faceted study of “The Uncanny”, has observed that the “Uncanny” is self-reflexive and represents something that is constantly shifting:

There is, in short, something strange about the qualities of Freud’s text: sometimes a passage or a single sentence can appear to open up entirely new worlds of thought. At other times it can seem strangely incoherent, curiously repetitive and inconclusive. We may feel, on occasion, that we are ‘familiar’ with Freud’s text, but then something new and unexpected will shift into focus. [...] More than perhaps any other work by Freud, ‘The Uncanny’ itself seems uncanny in the sense that it keeps doing different things not only to the reader but also, somehow, to *itself*.<sup>25</sup>

Any reader of Freud’s essay on the “The Uncanny” will have encountered the same reading experience as Royle – the “Uncanny” eludes one’s grasp; it slips around, and every re-reading of the essay presents something new and different. Nonetheless, Royle does present us with a fascinating plethora of directions to explore in our forays into the “Uncanny”.

In *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reappraisal*, Elizabeth Wright describes the general critical consensus regarding “what Freud leaves out of Hoffmann’s tale and what he leaves out of psychoanalysis”.<sup>26</sup> For Wright:

Hoffmann’s story has a better account of the uncanny in it than the one Freud gives, both as regards literature and as regards psychoanalysis. But most interestingly, what Freud leaves out of Hoffmann transferentially strays into his long digressive essay.<sup>27</sup>

Wright proceeds to argue that the “Uncanny” in fictional texts has far more narrative resources and strategies than Freud recognizes, for example repeated images of fire and blood. Freud’s failure to recognize such devices utilized by the return of the repressed signals a huge omission on the part of Freud and this omission spills over into his psychoanalysis. For Wright, interested in a feminist response, Freud’s insistence that the fear of losing one’s eyes represents the fear of castration overlooks the privileged relationship between the eyes as the most powerful organs of desire and the organs through which the child “perceives what the mother “lacks”.<sup>28</sup> For Wright, Freud completely fails to take into account the implications of this. Above all, the radical implications of the “uncanny” for the arts have not only been ignored, but have somehow been denied:

Freud produces an explanation for the uncanny in *experience*, as a resurgence of an infantile complex, or as a revisiting of an animistic mode of perception, or both, but he has none for the uncanny *in fiction*.<sup>29</sup>

The artist, Wright argues, can do special things with the repressed:

Literature and the arts can present us with forms of the uncanny that life cannot, because the writer/artist has more access to illusion. He can contextualize as he wishes, choose whatever frame he likes (Magritte), discuss illusion (Hoffmann). Whereas in life one is at the mercy of repetition (the repeated detour to the brothel Freud relates in ‘The uncanny’) the artist can play with the repressed.<sup>30</sup>

It is this quality of play, inherent in the aesthetic, which emerges as key for Wright. She cites the uncanny objects loved by the Surrealists, “the watch that melts (Dali), the pipe that proclaims ‘Ceci n’est pas une pipe’ (Magritte)”.<sup>31</sup> “The uncanny”, she argues, “is the illusory aspect of all objects brought home to us.”<sup>32</sup> These “uncanny” objects may fail to satisfy our desires: in displaying this fact, they simultaneously proclaim and *enjoy* their own “uncanny” status.

Wright highlights the radical potential for aesthetics which the “uncanny” possesses, a radical potential which eluded its creator. However, although Freud failed to grasp the implications of his own discovery, other critics have succeeded in recognizing the radical implications of the “Uncanny”.

Recent years have begun to see a growth of scholarship in the “Uncanny”, much of which has been directed towards uncovering the potential of the “Uncanny” for aesthetics, often in illuminating ways. For example, in “Stifter and the Postmodern Sublime”, Michael Minden explores why the “Uncanny” and the Sublime are so frequently found to occur together in the works of Adalbert Stifter.<sup>33</sup> Minden takes as his starting point Bloom’s canonical statement that the “Uncanny” “is of enormous importance to literary criticism because it is the only major contribution that the twentieth century has made to the aesthetics of the Sublime”.<sup>34</sup> Minden provides a persuasive argument for how the “Uncanny” can be found to produce the effect of the Sublime in Stifter, for example in the reduction of the landscape in *Mica* (1853) to a blank wasteland in which all forms have been dissolved:

This is the landscape (...) that will be overthrown in and through its very sublimity, and become blankly unfamiliar. (...) Significantly, a whole life-sustaining world of *forms* is overthrown.<sup>35</sup>

For Minden, this dissolution of forms in the landscape means that it is the “Uncanny” that produces the effect of the Sublime: they have become fused: the “Uncanny” has taken the place of the Sublime. Minden highlights another moment of fusion between the “Uncanny” and the Sublime, when the mother runs to greet the children returning from the storm. The mother, figured as “a white form”, is identified with the storm through her whiteness. She thus represents once again the danger that they have just escaped, running to meet them.

Minden writes:

But in - fleetingly but surely unmistakeably - personifying the storm in the mother (via the colour white), the sublime event has been shown to be uncannily linked with that which we all regard as the most familiar, the most reassuring and our own: the mother’.<sup>36</sup>

What Minden describes is of course the ultimate “Uncanniness”, the sense of danger and of

the unknowable encountered within that which should be the most familiar, the safest place, the mother. Here the repetition is “Uncanny” precisely because of what is being repeated where: the devastating storm is located within the mother herself.

Minden succeeds very well in showing not only that Stifter is “uncanny”, but, above all, the *way* in which he is “uncanny”. His insistence that repetition generates the “Uncanny” is highly revealing. He quotes the way the line, “We did not meet a soul”, is repeated and refracted in *From the Bavarian Forest* (1867) and draws the consequent insight:

We are witnessing the birth of Stifter’s late style from the spirit of the Uncanny. This style can be called uncanny because it makes the familiar gesture of narrative unfamiliar, because it plays disconcertingly between lifelessness and animation, and because it is a style of *repetition*.<sup>37</sup>

The “Uncanny” is, therefore, for Minden, constitutive of Stifter’s late writing style. I will return to this point later because it is of direct relevance to repetition in Klein’s persecutors. He supports the assertion made by Helena Ragg-Kirkby that Stifter’s late style “bespeaks [...] the *magnificence* of utter negation”.<sup>38</sup> For Minden, this represents the fusion of the “Uncanny” and the Sublime at the level of style. Yet that “utter negation” can also be seen to be the death-instinct at work through repetition: in other words, Klein’s “instinct of aggression”, returning over and over again.

## Klein

The child psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1880-1960) developed a body of theory built on Freud’s insights and took them in her own radical direction. Her theoretical observations are derived from her empirical observations of children’s behaviour, in which she highlighted the pivotal roles of aggression and envy in constituting object-relations.

It is not my intention here to give an overview of all aspects of her theoretical writings.<sup>39</sup>

Instead, I would like to highlight those aspects of her theory which are particularly relevant for the “Uncanny”. The theorization of the “Uncanny” and the critical response to it have hitherto been Freudian and Lacanian in their focus.<sup>40</sup> I would argue, however, that, when it comes to the “Uncanny”, Klein reaches the parts that other theorists cannot. In fact, it is only through re-viewing Freud’s “Uncanny” through the Kleinian optic that we can come to a better understanding of what constitutes the “Uncanny” in fictional texts. My intention is to re-formulate the “Uncanny” in terms of Klein: this may in turn liberate potential new readings of fictional texts in the light of what, with tentative boldness, I would like to call the “Kleinian Uncanny”.

Klein’s radical insight into aggression came from her observation of sadism in children’s play. Klein theorized that, from the moment it is born, the infant forms a relation to the mother’s breast which forms the basis for all object-relations.<sup>41</sup> “Insofar as the breast gratifies the infant’s needs, it is internalized in phantasy as a “good” or “idealized” breast, whereas the breast which frustrates the infant is internalized as the “bad” breast”.<sup>42</sup> For the first six months of life, Klein argues, the infant is under the sway of what Klein terms “the paranoid-schizoid” position, in which it relates only to what she terms “part-objects”, part-objects because they are not yet internalized in phantasy as whole objects.<sup>43</sup> In this phase, the paranoid-schizoid position, the infant is dominated by internal phantasy relations to either very good, idealized images or very bad, persecutory objects. The mechanism of splitting into either very “good”, “idealized” objects or very “bad”, “persecutory” ones is a way for the rudimentary infantile ego to protect the internalized “good” object from the infant’s own aggression: through the mechanism of splitting, the “good”, “idealized” object is protected from the subject’s own sadism. The fact that these objects are felt to be very persecutory is, I would argue, highly significant for an understanding of the “Uncanny”. I will now explore this crucial aspect of Klein.

For Klein, the objects in the paranoid-schizoid phase are felt to be persecutory precisely because the infant phantasizes that the sadism which it has projected on to the internal “bad” object returns in retaliation to persecute it:

For it is because the baby projects its own aggression on to these objects that it feels them to be ‘bad’ and not only in that they frustrate its desires: the child conceives of them as actually dangerous - persecutors who it fears will devour it, scoop out the inside of its body, cut it to pieces, poison it - in short, compassing its destruction by all the means which sadism can devise.<sup>44</sup>

For Klein, persecution plays a huge role in the infant’s phantasy life. It is important to emphasize that in Klein these persecutors are imagined as plural, returning in retaliation against the infant, and that the attacks take the form of sadistic attacks upon the body. These aggressive attacks are the very same ones which the infant has in phantasy inflicted upon the mother’s body and, in phantasy, they are imagined to take place repeatedly. The “repressed”, in this case, phantasied aggressive attacks, returns *repeatedly* to haunt the infant.

Klein’s essay “Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and In the Creative Impulse” (1929).<sup>45</sup> is crucial for an understanding of the way aggression and fears of persecution work in Klein, and, as a consequence, it is hugely illuminating for a potential Kleinian exploration of the “Uncanny”. In “Infantile Anxiety Situations”, Klein gives a Kleinian reading of an opera by Ravel, whose story she takes from a review by Eduard Jakob in the newspaper *Berliner Tageblatt*.<sup>46</sup>

A child of six years old gets bored in his lessons and, in response to his proclamation that “I’d like best of all to eat up all the cake in the world”, he is told that, “You shall have dry bread and no sugar in your tea!”<sup>47</sup> Presented with this oral frustration, he unleashes his infantile sadism upon the objects in the room: he smashes the tea-pot and cup into “a thousand pieces”,<sup>48</sup> tries to stab the squirrel in its cage, pokes the fire furiously with the tongs, tears the wallpaper, pulls the pendulum out of the grandfather-clock and pours ink over the table. The objects of his attack retaliate:

The things he has maltreated come to life. An armchair refuses to let him sit in it or have the cushions to sleep on. Table, chair, bench and sofa suddenly lift up their arms and cry: ‘Away with the dirty little

creature!’ The clock has a dreadful stomach-ache and begins to strike the hours like mad. The tea-pot leans over the cup, and they begin to talk Chinese. Everything undergoes a terrifying change. The child falls back against the wall and shudders with fear and desolation. The stove spits out a shower of sparks at him. (...) The shreds of the torn wallpaper begin to sway and stand up, showing shepherdesses and sheep. (...) the rent in the paper, which separates Corydon from his Amaryllis, has become a rent in the fabric of the world! <sup>49</sup>

What is important here is that the objects upon which the boy has inflicted his aggression come to life and attack him with all the means at their disposal. They are literally *animated* in retaliation against him and it is aggression which animates them, nothing else. This will be of pivotal importance when it comes to addressing the “Uncanny” from a Kleinian perspective.

Frightened, the boy runs into the garden where he encounters a terrifying array of animals who attack him. In a fight which ensues, a squirrel falls wounded to the ground and the boy ‘instinctively takes off his scarf and binds up the little creature’s paw’. <sup>50</sup> For Klein, this can clearly be seen as an act of reparation, <sup>51</sup> the desire to repair which stems from “depressive” <sup>52</sup> concern that the object has been damaged in phantasy. The child “is restored to the human world of helping”. <sup>53</sup>

However, I am more concerned here with Klein’s vivid depictions of infantile sadism and her reading of them. She interprets the attack on the squirrel in the cage and the pendulum in the clock as attacks on the mother’s body and the father’s penis within it. The tearing of the wallpaper, which separates ‘Corydon from his Amaryllis’ <sup>54</sup> is similarly read as an attack on the united parents in the act of *coitus*. Klein goes on to give a vivid account of the weapons used by the boy:

The ink poured over the table, the emptied kettle, from which a cloud of ashes and steam escapes, represent the weapon which very little children have at their disposal: namely the device of soiling with excrement. Smashing things, tearing them up, using the tongs as a sword - these represent the other weapons of the child’s primary sadism, which employs his teeth, nails, muscles and so on. <sup>55</sup>

The weapons used by the boy are therefore in phantasy the weapons at his disposal - these are weapons of the *body*, directed in phantasy at the mother’s body.

The objects attacked by the boy and the animals in the garden become transformed in phantasy into myriads of persecutors who attack him. As we shall see when we look at the

“Uncanny” through Klein, the plural nature of the persecutors will be significant. Klein writes:

The hostile animals represent a multiplication of the father, whom he has also attacked, together with the children assumed to be in the mother. (...) The world, transformed into the mother’s body, is in hostile array against the child and persecutes him.<sup>56</sup>

The world, therefore, becomes transformed into myriads of persecutors, who rise up in hostile array against the child. In the child’s phantasy, these persecutors will be Legion and they are figured as very dynamic. In “A Contribution to The Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States”, Klein writes that “to the paranoiac the disintegrated object is mainly a multitude of persecutors, since each piece is growing again into a persecutor”.<sup>57</sup> The object, therefore, which has been smashed to pieces in phantasy becomes myriads of persecutors, in which each fragmented piece is a persecutor in its own right. Fragmentation is thus represented as a highly dangerous process.

I have examined Klein’s “Infantile Anxiety Situations” in considerable detail because it is absolutely essential in order to illustrate Klein’s relevance to the “Uncanny”. It is here that the myriads of persecutors which are a cornerstone of Klein’s theoretical writings most vividly come to life. They are the dynamic enactment of infantile aggression and retaliation.

It will be obvious that my primary focus is on the negativity within Klein, the destructive power of her aggression, rather than the reparative thrust of her narratives, in which reparation makes whole the object which has been smashed to pieces in phantasy. This is because her most radical insights come out of these vividly depicted phantasies of aggression which are profoundly disturbing and destabilizing. Yet the radical power of Klein’s insights extends far beyond themselves: they enable us to read the “Uncanny” in a new way and see what we could not see before. Wright highlights Klein’s potential for readings which do not seek to cosset the reader in reparative closure, but instead give voice to ambiguity, ambivalence and the disruptive power of negativity.<sup>58</sup> Jacqueline Rose, meanwhile, has argued for a reading of Klein which would liberate negativity from what has essentially



been its repression within psychoanalytic discourse.<sup>59</sup> For Rose, the humanities have “aestheticized psychoanalysis, bypassing other points of (greater) friction”.<sup>60</sup> This, I would argue, is what has hitherto happened to discussions of the “Uncanny”: psychoanalytic accounts have hitherto failed to give aggression their rightful place.

### **Webber and the animated robot Maria**

In an illuminating study entitled, “Canning the Uncanny: The Construction of Visual Desire in *Metropolis*”, Andrew Webber gives a reading of Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* in the light of the “Uncanny”, focusing primarily on Freud and Lacan. Webber identifies the figure of the robot Maria, played by Brigitte Helm, as a “phallic” woman<sup>61</sup>. The phallic woman functions as a fetish, signalling and covering up the lack that is castration. For Webber, the “Uncanny” conjured up by the image of the phallic woman here simultaneously re-affirms and subverts patriarchy. Webber argues that the image of the “phallic” woman is projected on to the film screen, and in doing so, its status as *filmic image*, as part of the film medium itself is emphasized in a plethora of “uncanny” ways. Webber’s analysis of *Metropolis* focuses in particular on the gaze and the fetish. Webber’s reading, as a Freudian and Lacanian reading, is imbricated with an awareness of the way sexuality and the shimmering process of image-making are inextricably intertwined: it functions beautifully as such. My purpose here, however, is to take his insights a stage further and to implicate Klein in Webber’s reading such that a new way of reading may emerge.

Webber analyses certain key scenes in the film where the “Uncanny” and the process of creating the image of the female body as an alluring filmic image interpenetrate and mutually illuminate one another. For example, in the scene in which the laboratory process creates the robot Maria, the image of Brigitte Helm is projected on to the robot, which:

simulates sex in its mounting excitement of moving parts and frothing fluids. Its key focus, however, is on the immobile object of the automaton and the rings of light which seek to electrify it into life by their massaging movement.<sup>62</sup>

This is interpreted by Webber, therefore, as a sex act between phallus and hand, and, when the robot Maria emerges as the triumphant sex object, exposed in all her sexual glory to the scopic male gaze, she is the ultimate fetish:

what comes in the climax of this simulation is the successful simulation of the female figure, but always in the shape of the phallus; a female figure which is above all constructed according to the psychoanalytic specifications of the fetish, that is as an object which is designed to make up for lack, a perfectly engineered prosthesis.<sup>63</sup>

Webber emphasizes the status of the robot Maria both as phallic woman and fetish. She arouses feelings of the “Uncanny” due to her proximity to the castration complex.

Webber’s essay is a seminal reading of *Metropolis* in the light of the “Uncanny”, revealing new areas of exploration. However, I would like to build on Webber’s insights and extend the implications of his argument beyond his original intention. Webber dwells for the most part on the robot Maria as the passive object of the male scopic gaze, although he does highlight her “uncanny” laughter as she burns. What he overlooks is the fact that, in the laboratory animation scene, the robot Maria is brought to life as a *persecutor*. The robot Maria is brought to life with only one purpose, and that is to deal death. Her highly persecutory essence is revealed from the very first moments of her animation, from her triumphant laughter, brittle, aggressive gestures, and her identification with a death’s head. Webber interprets the overlaying of her image with that of a “death’s head” as due to the fear of castration which she signifies.<sup>64</sup> This, however, is to underplay the very real threat of death which she embodies.

And this is the point: the robot Maria literally *embodies* the threat of death. Her body and her threatening gaze, in particular her mouth, which opens in order to proclaim death-dealing laughter, are animated in order to attack; they incarnate the rampant desires of the Kleinian infant to inflict sadistic attacks upon the object which deprives it of satisfaction.

Even the robot Maria's sex dance, which Webber reads as the dance of the phallic woman to gratify the scopic male gaze,<sup>65</sup> can be read as the dance of a persecutor which enacts a triumphant, death-dealing dance: it is a dance of phantasied revenge. The proliferation of eyes which Webber sees as the signifiers of "the compulsively repetitive representation of the primal lack which is castration",<sup>66</sup> could equally be read as the proliferation of persecutors, which return in retaliation to wreak their vengeance upon the infant. Their very proliferation, which to Webber signifies excess in order to "represent lack" can, with a Kleinian twist, be seen as myriads of persecutors.<sup>67</sup> In a Kleinian reading, the robot Maria could be read as the bad, "persecutory" internal object, come to life in retaliation for phantasied sadistic attacks. Indeed, the robot Maria is very lively indeed, very aggressive, and she uses her body as a weapon, just like the Kleinian child.

My argument, therefore, is that Kleinian aggression should fully be brought into the equation of the "Uncanny". I would argue that this is the link which Freud and subsequent critics missed and which only a Kleinian analysis can reveal. Only a Kleinian refraction of the "Uncanny" can help us to understand what energies fuel the "Uncanny". Fear of castration is, as critics such as Royle have pointed out, simply not enough: not only does it not go far enough in addressing the question of a feminist response<sup>68</sup>, but, above all, it does not go far enough in explaining why the "Uncanny" is *frightening*.

### **Schnitzler's "Uncanny"**

Let us turn now to our analysis of Schnitzler's prose fiction in the light of Klein. I will focus on the representation of death in two of Schnitzler's prose pieces, the short story "Flowers" and the novella *Dream Story*. As we have seen, Schnitzler's writings abound in images of the dead or potentially dead love object, most often a female figure, who has died suddenly or been killed, and returns in phantasy to haunt the protagonist.

On the surface of it, one explanation for this recurrent trope is guilt. As Swales points out, Schnitzler's writings are predominantly concerned with the conflict between freedom and responsibility.<sup>69</sup> Schnitzler's male protagonists are drifters who are unable to make decisions, paralyzed and caught in a lethargy which is part of what makes them and their society so permissive. Swales, therefore, quite rightly, highlights the moral issues which inform Schnitzler's writings. It is, indeed, striking, how often the trope of the dead or dying woman, the ghostly or shadowy female figure, is invoked as a response to the male (or very occasionally female) desire to be free of the responsibilities incurred by the relationship. Psychoanalytic criticism, however, seeks to uncover the unconscious forces at work beneath the shimmering textual fabric of the written text. What I wish to emphasize is the violence inherent to the representation of these dead or ghostly female figures.<sup>70</sup> There is a savagery which underlies this element in Schnitzler and that same savagery underpins a Kleinian understanding of the "Uncanny". Schnitzler's preoccupation with guilt and the evasion of genuine concern and responsibility manifested by his characters go hand in hand with a Kleinian analysis intent upon revealing the current of aggression with which the fabric of Schnitzler's texts is imbricated. For it is precisely such unresolved aggression which, for Klein, gives rise to the desire to flee the object which has been damaged in phantasy.

In "Flowers", the narrator learns that a girl with whom he was romantically involved has just died. We are told that he rejected her because she was unfaithful to him, but that she sent him many letters, begging him for forgiveness. The class implications of this are clearly implied by Schnitzler: she was a working-class girl, consequently more vulnerable to sexual advances from another man, while the narrator is a man from the upper middle classes. What is clear is that he rejected her quite cruelly and self-righteously: "Hadn't she long been dead to me? ... yes, dead, or rather, I thought to myself with the childish self-pity of a man betrayed, "worse than dead"...?" ("F", 22/"B", 220)<sup>71</sup> She has thus been consigned to the

realm of death, or, indeed, even worse, social death, by the self-pitying and self-righteous male narrator.

The first-person narration strongly implies that the girl's death is the result of her grief at this rejection:

How she has been languishing for some time, but had not been in bed more than a week...What had been the matter with her?...“Some emotional disorder...anaemia...One can never pin those doctors down.” (“F”, 23/“B”, 221)

The narrator's search for the cause of death reveals his attempt to hide to himself his own part in the girl's death, but Schnitzler shows us his guilt clearly. In fact, the narrator seems completely unable to mourn her loss.<sup>72</sup>

I had a vision of myself as cold and utterly hard –hearted. As someone who could stand beside the grave into which a loved one has been lowered, without a tear, indeed without any capacity for feeling. (“F”, 24/“B”, 223)

This inability to mourn is of crucial significance to a Kleinian understanding of the “Uncanny”. For Klein, the ability to mourn the lost loved object, the object lost in phantasy (through the infant's own sadism), means that the infant is able to internalize the lost good object. Thus, mourning is an intrinsic part of developing love and concern for the lost object.<sup>73</sup> Swales argues that the narrator's “lack of feeling for the person is compensated for by the excess of feeling for the thing”.<sup>74</sup> In his account, the lack of genuine feeling manifests itself in sentimentality, which is “shown as an outpouring of feeling on an image of experience, rather than on the experience itself”.<sup>75</sup> This pouring of emotion on to “an image of experience” is a crucial aspect of a Kleinian reading, since, once again, it reveals the lack of love and true concern for the whole object, for a real person. Excessive emotion directed at an image is fundamentally narcissistic and veils the unresolved aggression which emerges in an estranged form through the “Uncanny”.

The “Uncanny” enters the scene when the narrator receives a bunch of flowers from the dead girl. She has been sending him flowers every month from a flower shop as a memory of happy times, and the flowers arrive once more, like a greeting from beyond the

grave:

There, neatly held together by a golden thread lay a bunch of violets and carnations... They lay there as if inside a coffin. ("F", 25/"B", 223)

The flowers are metonymically linked to the girl;<sup>76</sup> they come from her, and the fact that they are an attribute of her melts into an image of them as a human body: they are likened to a human body lying inside a coffin, the body of the dead girl. The narrator touches them and feels "a shiver run down my spine" ("F", 25/"B", 223). From the beginning, therefore, their sensuous and corporeal attributes are highlighted and the narrator relates to them in these terms. He attempts to rationalize away his sense that the flowers embody the ghostly presence of the girl, telling himself she placed the order in the shop shortly before her demise, but then he is seized by the phantasy that the flowers are moving and speaking to him:

And yet, as I held the flowers in my hand, and they seemed to tremble and incline their heads, against all reason and my own resolve, I could not help finding them a little uncanny, as if they came direct from her, as if this were her greeting... as if even now in death she still wanted to tell me of her love, of her – belated faithfulness. ("F", 25/"B", 224).

The flowers, therefore, *come to life*, in order to tell the narrator of their love. In a Kleinian reading, therefore, the narrator could be seen to project his own fear of persecution into the flowers, which in turn become animated. So far, the activity of the flowers, telling the narrator of the girl's belated fidelity, appears quite gentle, but, as I hope to show, this apparent gentleness will be shown to conceal an increasingly violent aspect.

The narrator is figured as touching the flowers again and this act of touching is in phantasy associated with touching the body of the dead girl. He affirms that he touches the flowers with more delicacy than usual, as though by touching them too hard he might inflict harm on her body and cause the flowers to moan. The flowers are imagined here as moaning in pain, like a body:

Today I tended the flowers differently, more tenderly than usual, as if gripping them too firmly might make them suffer... as if their quiet souls might softly start to weep. ("F", 25/"B", 224)

The latent aggression implied in this act of touching is clearly figured. The narrator touches

the flowers gently here in order *not* to cause the dead girl pain, but in phantasy he dwells on the thought of doing so, with more than a twinge of sexual and sadistic pleasure. In fact, he is also acutely aware of his power, in phantasy, to do so. Crucially, the identification between the flowers and the dead girl's body is already much stronger at this point.

The narrator becomes gradually obsessed by the presence of the flowers in his room.

They begin to haunt him and to embody a morbid erotic force:

The flowers are standing in the slender shimmering green vase, their stalks immersed in water, and their fragrance pervades the room. They are still exuding fragrance – even though they have now been in my room a week and have started wilting. (“F”, 26/“B”, 224-25)

The flowers seem to incarnate a phallic presence here, penetrating the water and towering above it, and they emanate a scent, which is emphasized. This scent, which seems to pervade the room, is powerful but is beginning to be associated with death, as the flowers “have started wilting”. Gradually they begin to exert an erotic yet persecutory power over the narrator, who believes that he hears them talking and complaining constantly:

Or rather, I am aware that they are continuously talking...even now....that they are talking and complaining incessantly, and that I am getting close to understanding them. (“F”, 26/“B”, 225)

These flowers are gradually figured as persecutory, constantly talking in what the narrator feels to be an accusatory way. Their active nature is emphasized increasingly, along with their plurality: the more animated they become, the more persecutory they are. At the same time, they become more closely associated with death in their physical substance: “They have now completely wilted” (“F”, 27/“B”, 225)), the narrator affirms as he becomes increasingly cloistered alone with the dying flowers. They are dying themselves: “The petals have begun to fall” (“F”, 27/“B”, 225). Then they are actually dead themselves: “They are making me ill” (“F”, 28/“B”, 225). Not content merely to die themselves, these flowers wish to take the narrator with them to the grave.

And this is my point. The energies which galvanize the flowers are experienced as persecutory by the narrator. The “Kleinian Uncanny” pivots upon this persecutory dynamic

which takes place within the powerful internal reality of the narrator.<sup>7</sup> The attack upon the narrator which emanates from the flowers within this internal reality is relentless. It is an internal reality which we are invited to share. Schnitzler makes masterly use of strategies which evoke a sense of the “Uncanny” in this story, such as the blurring between phantasy and reality and the uncertainty as to whether the flowers are actually alive or not, the aforementioned characteristics of Freud’s “Uncanny”. As readers we are simultaneously inside the narrator’s mind and under the spell of the flowers: we feel their “uncanny” pull towards death. But it is only Klein who enables us to unravel why these flowers exercise such power over the increasingly paralyzed narrator. It is because the flowers become animated with the persecutory energies of the paranoid-schizoid position, even if this is veiled under highly civilized Schnitzlerian prose. The more dynamic they become, the more this dynamism can be seen to emerge as an attack on the narrator’s life.

The narrator becomes convinced that he can see the image of the dead girl in the street, through his closed eyes. Only through his closed eyes does his sight acquire a new ability to see – an “uncanny” vision. As we have seen, the process of becoming visible is one of the keynotes of the Freudian “Uncanny”; it inhabits the borderline between that which is visible and that which is not visible:

I closed my eyes. And all at once I could see through my closed lids, and there the wretched creature stood in the wan light of the street lamp, and I saw her face with uncanny clarity, as though it were illuminated by a yellow sun, and saw those large bewildered eyes in her pale careworn face. (“F”, 8/“B”, 226)

The narrator becomes, quite literally, haunted by the image of the dead girl, an image which is caught between visibility and invisibility. He becomes fixated in particular by her eyes, which stare at him, full of mute accusation. Trapped in guilt rather than genuine remorse, her very presence as image becomes persecutory to him.

Throughout the story the dead girl, and the narrator’s living girlfriend, Gretel, are portrayed in somewhat derogatory terms as child-like, not powerful, and not sexual. All the



erotic power of female sexuality seems to be projected on to the image of the flowers. As the narrator stares at the by now dead flowers, he is fascinated by their dead and withered state, and once again it is their corporeality, however repulsive, which seizes hold of his imagination:

I stared at the flowers. They are scarcely flowers at all now, no more than bare stalks, pitiful and dry. ("F", 28/"B", 227)

The identification of the flowers with the body of the dead girl is here intensified. The flowers are characterized as "naked", creating an association of the erotic with the flowers which were likened to the girl's dead body. The narrator proceeds to associate the scent of putrefaction with the sensuous scent of youthful blossoming and sexuality:

Ghosts! – They exist, they exist! Dead things playing at being alive. And if wilting flowers smell of mould, it is only in memory of the time when they were blossoming and fragrant. ("F", 28/ "B", 227)

What could be more "uncanny" than the idea of dead things pretending to be alive, playing at life? The dead, rotting body of the girl becomes eroticized through the fusion of blossoming and mould. It is precisely because the girl is dead that her body seems to acquire an extra lure, an attraction she never possessed in life, the lure of putrefaction.

Yet the attraction of the erotic "Uncanny" is double-edged: for the "dead things" are not content merely to be enjoyed, they are there to take their revenge on life. Their persecutory nature may be subtly veiled, but their intention is nothing less than to alienate the narrator from life and suck him down to the Underworld with them. Persecuted by constantly seeing the invisible dead girl and hearing her wordless speech at every turn, the narrator shuts the curtains and makes the whole world dead around him:

I can let down the curtains and the sun is dead. I decide to have nothing more to do with all those people, and they too are dead. When I close the window, no scent of lilac wafts around me any longer, and the spring is dead. (...) And these dry stalks in the vase are mightier than any spring or scent of lilac. ("F", 28/ "B", 227)

Erotic sexuality fuses with persecutory energy in the image of the flowers. It is no accident that the flowers are invested with the properties of a sensuously arousing yet decaying female

body, for in a Kleinian reading this could be seen to represent phantasied attacks on the mother's body. The part-objects upon which the infant has projected its sadism come to life in retaliation and this is experienced as very frightening: it is only by harnessing the very vital energies of Kleinian theory that we can begin to understand why the "Uncanny" is so frightening: because in its shadows lurk myriads of persecutors, ready to attack. These persecutory forces are capable of killing the sun, all the people, and the spring for Schnitzler's narrator, who remains locked inside his own persecutory phantasies.

The narrator is saved by another female figure, a reparative figure, who throws the dead flowers out of the window, replacing them with fresh lilac blooms. The spell of sadism is broken and the narrator is returned to the world of the living. He therefore survives the encounter with the myriads of persecutors - but only just. We feel as readers how precarious his hold on a benevolent reality has been and the story remains very haunting. Only a psychoanalytic reading which addresses Klein can truly give voice to its "uncanny" power.

In *Dream Story*, the protagonist Fridolin undertakes a nocturnal journey into adventure which can be read as what Swales describes as "an allegorical journey into death".<sup>78</sup> Sexual jealousy propels the doctor Fridolin to embark upon a voyage through night-time Vienna, where he encounters the possibilities of sexual adventure and death. A chance encounter with his friend Nachtigall, who reveals that he plays the piano blindfold at orgies, compels Fridolin to infiltrate one such orgy. The men are clothed in monks' habits, while the women wear nuns' habits until later on when they are naked except for their masks, which veil them. One of the women repeatedly warns him that he is in grave danger, but Fridolin refuses to leave, until the moment when he is exposed and, obliquely, threatened with death.

Throughout the build-up to the orgy, there have been powerful suggestions that Fridolin would exchange his life for this sexual adventure. When a moment of hesitation occurs on the journey, he thinks: "My way lies forward, even were it to my death." (*DS*, 43/*T40*)<sup>79</sup> Later,

when the masked woman begs him to leave, he replies: “No more than my life can be at stake (...) and to me at this moment you’re worth it.” (*DS*, 48/*T*, 44) When he is challenged and threatened with exposure, which would mean death, the masked woman offers to sacrifice herself for him. Fridolin proclaims once more: “Life is no longer worth anything to me if I have to leave without you.” (*DS*, 53/*T*, 48) Yet, ultimately, Fridolin fails to act on these words. Facing away from Fridolin, the woman tears off her mask and her costume. Her body is highly eroticized, but Fridolin never sees her face:

Her dark costume fell away as if by magic, so that she stood there in all the radiance of her white body, and, taking hold of the veil wound about her brow, head and neck, with a (...) circular movement she removed it. It sank to the ground, and her dark hair cascaded over her shoulders, breast and hips. (*DS*, 53-54/*T*, 49)

The erotic and death fuse here in a very seductive image of a naked, living body, viewed only from the back. Unable to prevent her death, Fridolin embarks on a quest for the identity of the mysterious woman.

His quest to solve the mystery takes him to the morgue, where he encounters the dead body of a woman whom he suspects of being the woman who sacrificed herself for him. The scene which follows has powerful resonances of the “Uncanny” and, significantly, the sense of the “Uncanny” is focused on the representation of the woman’s body. Initially, it is the deadness of the body which is emphasized:

Was it her body? That wonderful blooming body that yesterday had tortured him with longing? He looked at the yellowish wrinkled neck, noticed the two small girlish, yet slightly sagging breasts, between which the breastbone stood under the pale skin with gruesome clarity, as if the process of decay had already set in; followed the contours of her lower body. .. (*DS*, 93-94/*T*, 83)

This, then, is the reality of death - and it is far from erotic. The body is ready for decomposition, the skeleton already visible. Swales argues that:

As so often in Schnitzler, death functions as an intensifying factor in the sexual adventure. One should note, however, that it is the notional presence of death, the *image* of death that heightens physical desire. The *actuality* of death destroys the magic of heightened sensuality.<sup>80</sup>

Swales argues, therefore, that it is the image of death which is erotic, while the reality of death is not. What he overlooks, however, is what happens next in what is a pivotal moment

in the text. As Fridolin contemplates the dead woman's body, something changes:

Almost as if driven by some unseen power, Fridolin touched the woman's brow, cheeks, arms and shoulders with both hands; then he intertwined his fingers with the dead woman's as if to fondle them, and, stiff as they were, they seemed to be attempting to move and to take hold of his; indeed, he thought he could detect a faint and distant gleam in the eyes beneath those half-closed lids trying to make contact with his own; and, as if drawn on by some enchantment, he bent down over her. (*DS* 94/T, 84)

As though compelled by an unseen magical force, Fridolin begins to touch the dead body.

Throughout *Dream Story*, Schnitzler invokes the metaphor of magic in order to express the notion of compelling unconscious forces which break through the surface of rationality and deprive the protagonist of rational control. His touch is an erotic touch, a longing to inhabit the dead body and bring it to life. He wraps his fingers around those of the dead woman, as if "to fondle them", seeking a response. It then seems to him as though the fingers try to move and seize hold of his. For Fridolin, gazing at the body, the eyes acquire an animating gaze and look out at his. "As if drawn on by some enchantment," Fridolin bends over to kiss the dead body.

Dangerous magic, however. Through her erotic appeal, the dead woman embodies not only the attraction of death but the desire to pull him into a deathly embrace with her. Here we have a body which is *animated*, which is experienced by the narrator as coming to life. Yet it comes to life in order to deal death. Once again, the danger which that body represents is very real, although it is veiled by the shimmering language of magic and the erotic. For the threat which the dead body incarnates is none other than that of an attack on life itself, the envy of the dead for the living.<sup>81</sup> Just like the flowers in "Flowers", which come to life in order to pull the protagonist down into death with them, so the dead woman in *Dream Story* comes to life in order to lure Fridolin into a deathly embrace. The dead body is animated by the aggression of the Kleinian persecutor and that aggression presents itself as love for death. It is that love for death which is camouflaged by the language of the imagined sexual encounter. The animated dead female body, despite her erotic appeal, is not good news for

the male protagonist: she has come to get him and pull him down to death with her. The dead body takes on the life of a Kleinian persecutor, with a “faint and distant gleam” in her eyes and the sense of uncanny life shuddering through her.

We can identify several strands which are inextricably intertwined here. First, the fusion of the erotic and death; sexual longing becomes a longing also for death. Second, the motif of the animated female corpse, the body of the dead woman which has come to “uncanny” life. Third, Schnitzler’s use of narrative perspective and frequent use of the subjunctive means that as readers we slip from inside Fridolin’s head, his own internal reality to outside it, which heightens the sense of the “Uncanny”. In addition, the uncertainty as to whether something is alive or not, which Freud highlights as one of the hallmarks of the “Uncanny”, is tangible.

The spell is broken by the intrusion of another male voice, not, as Swales argues, by the demystifying reality of death itself, which is never really explored in Schnitzler’s text. The voice of Doctor Adler cuts into the imagined sexual encounter with the words, “What on earth are you up to?”<sup>82</sup> However, the sense of precariousness is very powerful. Without the intrusion of the male voice which brings him back to reality, we sense that Fridolin might irrevocably have been seduced into death. Similarly, the protagonist of “Flowers” might well have succumbed to the lure of the ghostly flowers without the intervention of Gretel.

Much of Schnitzler’s prose fiction is peopled by ghostly female characters, a kind of living dead. These female characters are either already dead or about to be so: they were always intended for death, either through conscious or unconscious choice. Through examining the representation of Schnitzler’s “uncanny” female bodies, we can come to a new understanding of the “Uncanny” and of Schnitzler, one which is infused by Klein. I wish to argue that it is only through re-viewing Freud’s notion of the “Uncanny” in the light of Klein’s theory of aggression and the revenge of phantasied persecutors, that we can come to a

deeper understanding of what actually makes the “Uncanny” so frightening and so powerful. The aggressive and persecutory nature of Schnitzler’s female figures is crystallized in their encounters with the male protagonists and, in particular, through the encounters of these male protagonists with their “uncanny” dead bodies.<sup>83</sup> Schnitzler’s “Flowers” and *Dream Story* offer us paradigmatic moments through which we can re-examine the “Uncanny” in the light of Kleinian aggression. This in turn leads us to uncover a hitherto unexplored facet of Schnitzler, namely a fascination with dead, ghostly female figures and bodies who, in phantasy, come to vengeful life in order to claim the lives of the men who have failed them.

### Works Consulted

Bloom, Harold. "Freud and the Poetic Sublime." In, *Poetics of Influence: New and Selected Criticism*, edited by John Hollander, 187-212. New Haven: Henry R Schwab, 1988.

Bonaparte, Marie. *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation*. Translated by John Rodker. London: Imago, 1949.

Bowie, Malcolm. *Freud, Proust and Lacan: theory as fiction*. Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Bronfen, Elisabeth. *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992.

David, Nicolette. *Love, Hate and Literature: Kleinian Readings of Dante, Ponge, Rilke, and Sarraute*. New York and Washington: Peter Lang, 2003.

Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane. New York: The Viking Press, 1977. [L'Anti-Oedipe: Vol I, Capitalisme et schizophrénie. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1972.]

Downing, Lisa. *Desiring the Dead: Necrophilia and Nineteenth-Century French Literature*. Oxford: Legenda, 2003.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. Translated by David McLintock, 121-62. London: Penguin Books, 2003.

Freud, Sigmund. "Das Unheimliche." In *Das Unheimliche: Aufsätze zur Literatur*, 45-84. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1963.

Jürgensen, Christoph, Lukas, Wolfgang, and Scheffel, Michael, eds. *Schnitzler Handbuch: Leben-Werk-Wirkung*. Stuttgart & Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzlar, 2014.

Hinshelwood, R.D. *A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought*. London: Free Association Press, 1991.

Klein, Melanie, *The Writings of Melanie Klein*, 4 vols. London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychoanalysis. Abbreviated to WMK I-IV.

----- "The Early Development of Conscience in the Child." WMK I, 248-257.

----- "Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse." WMKI, 210-19.

----- "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States." WMK I, 262-89.

Laplanche, Jean and Pontalis, Jean-Baptiste. *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*. Translated

by Donald Nicholson-Smith. London: The Hogarth Press, 1973. [*Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967.]

Minden, Michael. "Stifter and the Postmodern Sublime." In *History, Text, Value: Essays on Adalbert Stifter, London Symposium 2003* edited by Michael Minden, Martin Swales and Godela Weiss-Sussex. Publications of the Institute of Germanic Studies, vol 88 (2006): 9-21.

Meltzer, Donald. "The Kleinian expansion of Freudian metapsychology." *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, no 62 (1981): 177-85.

Poe, Edgar Allan. *Essays and Reviews*. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984.

Rose, Jacqueline. "Negativity in the work of Melanie Klein." In *Why War?: Psychoanalysis, Politics and the Return to Melanie Klein*, 130-40. Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1993.

Royle, Nicholas. *The uncanny*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.

Schnitzler, Arthur, *Dead Men Tell No Tales* and "Flowers." In *Arthur Schnitzler: Selected Short Fiction*. Translated by J.M.Q. Davies, 44-59, 22-29. London: Angel Press, 1999.

----- *Dream Story*. Translated by J.M.Q. Davies. London: Penguin Books, 1999.

Schnitzler, Arthur. *Gesammelte Werke: Die Erzählenden Schriften*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1961.

----- "Blumen." Band I, 220-28.

----- *Die Toten schweigen*. Band I, 296-312.

----- *Traumnovelle*. Band II, 434-504.

Sinclair, Alison. *The Deceived Husband: A Kleinian Approach to the Literature of Infidelity*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

Swales, Martin. *Arthur Schnitzler: A Critical Study*. Oxford and London: Clarendon Press, 1971.

Webber, Andrew. "Canning the Uncanny: The Construction of Visual Desire in *Metropolis*." In *Fritz Lang's Metropolis: Cinematic Visions of Technology and Fear*, edited by Michael Minden and Holger Bachmann, 251-271. Rochester, NY and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Camden House, 2000.

Wright, Elizabeth. *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reappraisal* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 1998.

----- *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.



---

<sup>1</sup>See Freud, "Das Unheimliche", and Klein. All references to Freud's "Das Unheimliche" will be to "Das Unheimliche" (1919), *Das Unheimliche: Aufsätze zur Literatur*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Doppelpunkt 4, 1963, 45-84. All references to the English translation will be to "The Uncanny" (1919). Penguin Modern Classics, trans. David McLintock, London: Penguin Books 2003, 121-62. All references to Klein's writings will be to *The Writings of Melanie Klein*, 4 vols, London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychoanalysis, abbreviated to WMK I-IV. For a Kleinian account of aggression, see Klein, "Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse," WMK I. See also, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," WMK I.

<sup>2</sup> Freud, "The Uncanny," 148/"Das Unheimliche," 70.

<sup>3</sup> I shall make use of the Kleinian spelling of phantasy, which begins with a 'ph' instead of an 'f'. For Klein, phantasy is all-pervasive. Alison Sinclair in *The Deceived Husband* suggests that this unusual spelling denotes; "the transferential and unreliable nature of this experience of the world", 7, n.12.

<sup>4</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, "The philosophy of composition", in *Essays and Reviews*, 19.

<sup>5</sup> Downing, *Desiring the Dead*, 29. Downing gives an account of necrophilia in Nineteenth-Century French literature and defines necrophilia as follows: "Necrophilia thus becomes explicable as a desirous and idealizing relation to death, manifest in actual perversion or in representation." 5. For a detailed account of Poe's attraction to the female corpse in his work, see Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, 326 – 36, 366 – 67.

<sup>6</sup> Bonaparte, *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, 260.

<sup>7</sup> Bonaparte, *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, 260.

<sup>8</sup> Swales, *Arthur Schnitzler*, 141.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the body, see Elizabeth Wright, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, 35-40.

<sup>10</sup> Freud, "The Uncanny," 124/"Das Unheimliche," 46.

<sup>11</sup> Freud, 138/58.

<sup>12</sup> Freud, 138/60.

<sup>13</sup> Freud, 140/60.

<sup>14</sup> Freud, 148/70.

<sup>15</sup> Freud, 150/73-4.

<sup>16</sup> Freud, 145/67.

<sup>17</sup> For an account of the death instinct in Freud and Klein, see Hinshelwood, *Dictionary*, 266-70. See also Klein, "Early Development" in WMK I, 251.

<sup>18</sup> Minden, "Stifter," 14-15.

<sup>19</sup> Klein, "Early Development," 253.

<sup>20</sup> Royle, *The uncanny*, 108.

<sup>21</sup> Royle, 108.

<sup>22</sup> Paul de Man, quoted in Royle, 108.

<sup>23</sup> Freud, "The Uncanny," 150.

<sup>24</sup> Meltzer, "Kleinian expansion," 178.

<sup>25</sup> Royle, 7-8.

<sup>26</sup> Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism*, 131.

<sup>27</sup> Wright, 131.

<sup>28</sup> Wright, 132.

<sup>29</sup> Wright, 133.

<sup>30</sup> Wright, 134.

<sup>31</sup> Wright, 134.

<sup>32</sup> Wright, 134.

<sup>33</sup> Minden, "Stifter," 9-21.

<sup>34</sup> Bloom, "Freud," 196.

- 
- <sup>35</sup> Minden, "Stifter," 16.
- <sup>36</sup> Minden, 15.
- <sup>37</sup> Minden, 14.
- <sup>38</sup> Minden, 17.
- <sup>39</sup> For an account of Kleinian theory, see David, *Love, Hate and Literature*, 3-10.
- <sup>40</sup> See Royle, *The uncanny* and Webber, "Canning the Uncanny". My argument pivots upon the notion that the relationship between Klein and literary texts has not yet been fully explored, while the Freudian, Lacanian and Jungian approaches have been more fully explored by critics. For an illuminating analysis of the potential of other psychoanalytic approaches, see Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism*. For an imaginative account of the uses of Freud and Lacan as theoretical tools, see Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan*.
- <sup>41</sup> Klein focused on the infant within the adult.
- <sup>42</sup> David, *Love, Hate*, 3.
- <sup>43</sup> For an explosive account of the radical potential of 'partial objects', see Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 44. Here, Deleuze and Guattari argue that Klein failed to seize the radical implications of her own invention. For an account of the paranoid-schizoid position, see David, *Love, Hate*, 156-66.
- <sup>44</sup> Klein, "The Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," 262.
- <sup>45</sup> Klein, "Infantile Anxiety-Situations," 210-19.
- <sup>46</sup> Klein does not reference the opera herself. From her account it is clear that it is Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges* (1925).
- <sup>47</sup> Klein, "Psychogenesis," 210.
- <sup>48</sup> Klein, 210.
- <sup>49</sup> Klein, 210-11.
- <sup>50</sup> Klein, 211.
- <sup>51</sup> For a more detailed account of reparation, see David, *Love, Hate*, 5-6.
- <sup>52</sup> See Hinshelwood, *Dictionary*, 138-155.
- <sup>53</sup> Klein, "Infantile Anxiety-Situations," 211.
- <sup>54</sup> Klein, 211.
- <sup>55</sup> Klein, 212.
- <sup>56</sup> Klein, 214.
- <sup>57</sup> Klein, "Psychogenesis," 272.
- <sup>58</sup> Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism*, 83-84.
- <sup>59</sup> Rose argues in "Negativity in the work of Melanie Klein" that: "it has been too easy to politicize psychoanalysis as long as the structuring opposition has been situated between an over-controlling, self-deluded ego and the disruptive force of desire; that this opposition has veiled the more difficult antagonism between superego and the unconscious, where what is hidden is aggression as much as sexuality, and the agent of repression is as ferocious as what it is trying to control," 142.
- <sup>60</sup> Rose 144.
- <sup>61</sup> Webber, "Canning the Uncanny," 261.
- <sup>62</sup> Webber, 261.
- <sup>63</sup> Webber, 261.
- <sup>64</sup> Webber, 267.
- <sup>65</sup> Webber, 265.
- <sup>66</sup> Webber, 266.
- <sup>67</sup> Webber, 266.
- <sup>68</sup> For a problematization of the "Uncanny" from a gender perspective, see Wright, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, 436-40.
- <sup>69</sup> "It is with this individual quest for freedom above all else that Schnitzler is concerned." Swales, *Arthur Schnitzler*, 40.
- <sup>70</sup> For an illuminating study of the representation of the dead female body in patriarchal Western

---

culture, see Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*.

<sup>71</sup> I shall be referring to "Flowers" in *Arthur Schnitzler: Selected Short Fiction*, trans. J.M.Q. Davies (London: Angel Books, 1999), 22-29. "Flowers" will be abbreviated to "F". ["Blumen", *Die Erzählenden Schriften*, I, (Frankfurt am Main: S.Fischer Verlag, 1961), 220-29. "Blumen" will be abbreviated to "B".]

<sup>72</sup> For Klein, the ability to mourn the lost loved object, the object lost in phantasy, means that the infant is able to internalize the lost good object. Thus mourning is an intrinsic part of developing love and concern for the lost object.

<sup>73</sup> For an account of the depressive position and mourning, see Hinshelwood, *Dictionary*, 142-3.

<sup>74</sup> Swales, *Arthur Schnitzler*, 101.

<sup>75</sup> Swales, 101.

<sup>76</sup> "Carnations" and "violets" possess connotations of death in German and Austrian culture.

<sup>77</sup> For an account of "internal reality", see Hinshelwood, *Dictionary*, 330-31.

<sup>78</sup> Swales, *Arthur Schnitzler*, 141.

<sup>79</sup> I shall be referring to Arthur Schnitzler, *Dream Story*, trans. J.M.Q. Davies (London: Penguin Books, 1999). *Dream Story* will be abbreviated to *DS*. [*Traumnovelle* (Frankfurt am Main: S.Fischer Verlag, 1961). *Traumnovelle* will be abbreviated to *T*.]

<sup>80</sup> Swales, *Arthur Schnitzler*, 141.

<sup>81</sup> Envy is a cornerstone of Kleinian theory. See David, *Love, Hate*, 7-8.

<sup>82</sup> *DS*, 84.

<sup>83</sup> Although in Schnitzler it is mainly the dead female figure which seems to come to life, we can also detect the same strain in the representation of dead male figures, for example in *Dead Men Tell No Tales* [*Die Toten schweigen*], where it is a dead male figure which haunts the female protagonist.